DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 996 SP 002 608

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Differentiated Staffing: Expectations and Pitfalls.
National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, Washington, D.C.
Pub Date Mar 69
Note-8p.; Paper developed at NCTEPS write-in on school staffing patterns
Available from-Publications-Sales Section, NEA, 1201 16th St., N.W., Wash., D.C. 20036 (Stock No. 521-15638, $.10 in quantity; single copy free, NCTEPS, same address)
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
Descriptors-*Staff Utilization

Once a differentiated staffing pattern has been adopted--with the understanding that it is not a panacea--staff members have an obligation to minimize distinctions of rank and prevent organizational rigidity by contributing in role areas other than their own and sharing in decisionmaking. Teacher aides are not expected to be substitutes for teachers (who may wish to move into ancillary positions of planning and directing); nor does their employment necessarily signify a decrease in expenditures. Personality conflicts which may appear with team or group teaching may be resolved through therapeutic activities such as sensitivity training or through rotation of assignments. (LP)

ED028996

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TEPS *Write-in Papers on Flexible Staffing Patterns*

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DIFFERENTIATED STAFFING: EXPECTATIONS AND PITFALLS

Don Barbee

Differentiated school staffing is a concept of organization that seeks to make better use of educational personnel. Teachers and other educators assume different responsibilities based on carefully prepared definitions of the many teaching functions. The differential assignment of educational personnel goes beyond traditional staff allocations based on common subject matter distinctions and grade-level arrangements and seeks new ways of analyzing essential teaching tasks and creative means for implementing new educational roles.

It is recognized that man has yet to devise a philosophical system, organizational scheme, or procedural method which is without limitations or possible deficiencies. The concept of differentiated staffing is no exception. To be aware of potential problems and to anticipate means for avoiding or minimizing them is not only realistic but very likely essential to the ultimate success of any creative effort to implement such a concept. Therefore, factors that should be considered in planning and operating a differentiated staffing program are examined in this paper.

SP002608

National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036

FADISM

Prior experience has shown repeatedly that change for "fad's sake" is an unworthy alternative which ultimately detracts from bonafide professional efforts. It is important that the basic intent and characteristics of differentiated staffing be understood at the outset and implemented in fact. Occasionally, educational innovations have been adopted in name but not in practice. For example, the team-teaching concept in some instances has been endorsed in principle but not in practice. Especially has this been true where large and small groups were designed as distinct teaching units but taught as though they were the same.

The rationale for differentiated staffing is attractive, but it should not be sold as a panacea. Rather, it should be presented as a promising approach for dealing with needed changes in education. There is relatively little prior experience upon which to rely, and new ventures must be candidly considered and implemented, then given adequate opportunity for development and evaluation.

ECONOMIZING

Greater teaching efficiency, an objective of differentiated staffing, may be equated erroneously with increased economy. For instance, the use of teacher aides in lieu of professionally trained teachers may be a tempting way to sell a differentiated staffing program. Although differentiated staffing does expect to make more effective use of teaching personnel, there is no evidence to suggest that this can be achieved by decreasing expenditures.

One safeguard against financial exploitation of teacher aides is to clearly define professional and nonprofessional

tasks and see that allocation and performance of assignments are consistent with the preparation, experience, and competence of the personnel. Professional staff members working with aides should share the responsibility for seeing that the aides fulfill their proper functions.

TA SYNDROME

The use of teaching assistants (TA's) in colleges and universities is one illustration of the limited use of staff differentiation. The premise upon which teaching assistantships are predicated is most commendable, but questionable modifications have been made in its application. On some campuses TA's have become a major source of instructional personnel instead of serving as assistants to teachers. Similarly, in the elementary and secondary schools we occasionally find that student teachers and beginning teachers are given assignments which are not commensurate with their training and experience. Already some differentiated staffing proposals have anticipated using paraprofessionals as teacher substitutes in lieu of certified professional personnel. This problem is accentuated by the prevailing tendency for skilled instructors to move out of basic teaching situations to become involved in such ancillary activities as planning, coordinating, supervising, and directing.

It is possible, then, that by using the services of auxiliary personnel, teachers might become more remote from pupils and less involved in their problems and lives. Teachers will have to make a definite effort to avoid this pitfall. Teachers who have the help of auxiliary personnel should capitalize instead on the opportunity to work more closely with students as they take advantage of the assistance and ideas of their aides.

STATUS HIATUS

A differentiated staffing arrangement that incorporates a hierarchy of levels carries with it the possibility for status "discrepancies." Most administrators will recall a change of attitude experienced (in themselves and on the part of others) when moving from the role of teacher to the role of administrator. It might be described as the feeling that one is no longer a part of the same peer group, that is, "You're on the other side now." Differentiated staffing has the potential for minimizing the effects of this phenomenon, but at the same time it should be recognized that additional status levels may provide more opportunity for undesirable hierarchical distinctions to be made. Where position and title are overemphasized, where prerogatives of "office" are abused, and where respect of one's colleagues is derived from position rather than performance, professional relations will be unnecessarily encumbered and vital, everyday communication, with its essential flow of ideas, could be seriously impeded. The members of a differentiated staff who function in prime roles of responsibility have a particular obligation to minimize the distinction of rank and to help set a tone of openness, for creative ideas are not limited to categories of hierarchy.

PERSONALITY CONFLICTS

Differentiated staffing assumes new role definitions which will effect new interpersonal relationships and presents the possibility of personality differences. Especially will this be true in group or team arrangements. Personality differences are not so much pitfalls to be avoided as problems to be expected. Although reasonable efforts should be made to eliminate needless conflicts, it is perhaps more important to anticipate that differences will

occur (even in the most compatible groups) and be prepared to cope with them as they arise. It is conceivable that educational institutions have done too much in the past to avoid differences--differences in opinion, race, sex, teaching styles--and not made enough effort to cope with apparent incompatibilities.

Solutions to conflicts that arise within or between differentiated staff groups are difficult enough to prescribe in concrete situations let alone in the abstract. It seems evident, however, that some things about conflict resolutions can be learned and that some expertise does exist. Sensitivity groups of various types have proved helpful in certain cases; psychologists who specialize in group interaction have been valuable consultants; practicing school administrators often have considerable insight for dealing with conflict that can be shared profitably with members of differentiated staffs.

Teachers have recognized in recent years that students need to be reassigned from time to time (for a variety of reasons), and it is likely that teachers may want to exercise this option more frequently for themselves when other means for resolving personality differences are unsuccessful. As a further observation, it seems essential that differentiated staffing arrangements include options for teachers to function in traditional self-contained classrooms. The concept of differentiated staffing should not be expected to provide the ultimate for every teacher.

OVERSPECIALIZATION

Early studies of business and industry during the scientific-management era suggested that increased specialization would contribute directly and automatically to

increased productivity. The subsequent boredom and job alienation that resulted from overlooking the dynamics of human personality have only recently been partially alleviated by automation and job redefinition. Extensive differentiation of teaching staffs via job assignments which are highly definitive or specialized has the potential for restricting perspective, inhibiting individual initiative, and dampening enthusiasm for learning experiences.

The assignment of staff should not only allow but encourage members to go beyond an assigned sphere of operation. A social science specialist may be able to make important contributions to a reading program. A skilled lecturer may effectively spend time on remedial work with small groups. A kindergarten teacher may have much to offer a group of teenagers. A teacher aide may have a flair for coordinating certain staff activities. While new role definitions are vital to the differentiated staff concept, definitions should not become operational straitjackets. All members of the differentiated staff should have the opportunity to develop their individuality along lines which are beneficial to both students and staff.

DELIMITING DECISIONS

Differentiated staffing assumes a more sophisticated delineation of teaching tasks and higher levels of performance. It is vital that the potential assets of differentiated staffing are not dissipated by needless prescriptions and lack of opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes. Again, studies in business and industry have shown that bureaucratic expansion of structure tends to narrow decision-making opportunities of workers and push decision making into higher levels of an organization. It is essential that differentiated staffing programs avoid

bureaucratic tendencies and stress the unique characteristics of professionalism.

A professional organization, in contrast to an industrial bureaucracy, should function to increase the decision-making opportunities of all of its members. Staff members should be involved in those decisions that immediately or ultimately affect them. It is only logical to assume that a high level of involvement in relevant decision-making activities will significantly enhance a person's job satisfaction, productivity, and sense of self-realization.

In summary, this discussion of expectations and potential pitfalls of differentiated staffing was not meant to be comprehensive or to depreciate the proposed concept. The need for more effective educational programs is paramount, and the differentiated staffing idea represents an important, though qualified, approach to developing better teaching. It has much in common with the prevailing educational climate in which the classroom teacher is beginning to assert himself and assume a fuller role as an individual, a professional, and a member of society. Differentiated staffing, then, appears to be a viable idea that warrants exploration and testing as long as improvement in the quality of the learning situation for students remains the ultimate focal point.

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The TEPS "write-in" was a concentrated three-day private work session to develop needed literature on new, flexible school staffing patterns. Twenty-six educators from a variety of agencies and schools--people with background in and ideas on school staffing--were called together by the NEA National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards to participate. The papers in this series were selected from among those developed in the write-in.

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March 1969/5000